

RESOLVING CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

PURPOSE: This Operating Guide provides general guidelines for responding to and resolving customer complaints.

SCOPE: The provisions of the Operating Guide applies to all Services personnel

GENERAL: Customer complaints are to be expected. First, listen to the details of the complaint. Never argue, or dispute the guest. Their perception of the situation is very real to them. Always apologize, don't get defensive, and avoid blaming anyone or anything (cooks, equipment, etc.) for the problem. You may have to defuse their anger, let them vent. After you have heard the details, determine what action will satisfy the customer and resolve the complaint. The person handling the complaint should be empowered to resolve it. Complaints need immediate action at the lowest level possible.

GUIDANCE:

1. Listen patiently and sincerely to the complaint. Don't argue. The customer doesn't really care whether you're at fault or not. What they care about most is being heard and having their problem resolved.
2. Acknowledge the customer's viewpoint. Use a nondefensive reply that either mirrors the customer's feelings or the inconvenience they are experiencing, e.g., "I'm sorry you had to wait...", "I can understand your concern about..".
3. Get right to the possible solution -- don't dwell on the problem. This action shifts the focus of the complaint to a positive light and takes much of the sting out of it. Where possible involve the customer in resolving the complaint. When the customer becomes involved in the process, ownership is created for the solution. There are several benefits that result from this approach. First, it shows concern on your part -- you care enough to find out what they want rather than offering a take-it-or-leave-it attitude. Second, it helps to focus the customer on a positive closure to their complaint, rather than encouraging them to continue stewing. Most importantly, the customer is more likely to accept a solution they had a hand in developing.
4. Reach some kind of closure -- don't leave a customer hanging. If you cannot provide a service or resolve the problem, at least explain why or take the customer to someone who can help them. No one likes to be given the run around. When referring a complaint to your supervisor or someone else for assistance, offer to take the customer rather than pointing them in the direction. If you cannot leave your work area, call ahead and let the other person know that a customer is being referred to them and why. Stating policy as a way of resolving complaints is usually ineffective -- tell customers why certain conditions exist using terms they'll understand.

5. Follow through on complaints that you can handle. The customer will be assured that you genuinely care about finding a solution, as opposed to just getting rid of them e.g., "I can check into that and call you back with an answer". Make sure that you do call as soon as possible.

6. Be sincere -- don't just go through the motions. People who are not sincere only compound the problem they're trying to resolve. Treat your customer just as you'd like to be treated if you had a problem or complaint. Be polite, be friendly and be responsive.

7. Handling the Abusive, Unstable or Threatening Customer. Although you are expected to be courteous and helpful to complaining customers, you are not expected to endure unwarranted verbal abuse or threats from them. If you are confronted by an abusive or threatening customer and, after having attempted complaint resolution, cannot handle them yourself, step aside and get help from your supervisor. If in your best judgment the customer appears to be extremely unstable or threatening either to themselves, to you or to others around you, call the appropriate authorities immediately.

SUMMARY: We are a customer service organization that is only as good as our image. Being responsive to customer complaints is one of the most important aspects of maintaining a positive image. Customers are our most important asset; look at them, talk to them, listen to them, be responsive to them and thank them!